Review of Implementation of the Forest Land Enhancement Program
Testimony before the
House Agriculture Committee
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am Gary Nakamura, an extension forester from Redding, California. I also am a member of the Society of American Foresters (SAF) and was recently elected to serve on the Council of the Society, representing California and Hawaii SAF members. Today I am here to express the views of the Society of American Foresters with regard to sustainable management of private, nonindustrial forestland, particularly family-owned forests, and the Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP).

SAF—the largest scientific, professional, and educational forestry organization in the world—believes strongly in sustainable forest management on both public and private forest land, and our core values reflect this belief. As foresters, we must ensure the continued health and use of forest ecosystems and ensure that these resources are available for the benefit of society now and in the future. Because privately owned nonindustrial forestland constitutes the majority of this country's forested land, its management is of great interest and concern to the profession. SAF strongly believes that both public and private investment in these forests is necessary to ensure sustainable management of these resources and ultimately meet society's needs.

Why is there value in maintaining sustainable, working forests—particularly family-owned forests—that are managed for diverse ecosystem outputs and services? The current situation in southern California suggests that a preserved or not actively managed forest is not necessarily preserved forever. Many people consider harvesting of trees and thinning of forests to be destructive of the forest—yet 400,000 acres of ponderosa pine forest that were "protected" from harvest in the San Bernardino National Forest has now become overly dense and unhealthy. This forest has been killed by epidemics of insects, and the dead trees that pose a safety hazard are being removed at a cost of hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars.

In many ways, it is too late for southern California's nonindustrial private forests (NIPF), particularly family-owned forests, to benefit from cost-share and assistance programs such as FLEP. However, the Sierra Nevada and coastal redwood forest ecosystems are just now coming under development pressure, and there are still extensive NIPF forest ownerships that could benefit from FLEP, maintaining these forests as fully functioning forests. It certainly is not too late for many areas of the country, where we have the opportunity to assist family forest owners with protection and maintenance of their forests.

Nonindustrial private forestland constitutes 362 million acres, or more than half of all forestland in the United States. The majority of this forestland is owned by families and

individuals (approximately 75 percent). Most of these owners own between 1 and 99 acres of forestland. In the northern and southern United States, 71 percent of forests are in NIPF ownership. These forests contribute significantly to societal benefits. Almost all endangered species spend at least part of their time on private lands. These lands also are home to thousands of other species that aren't endangered. Sixty percent of the nation's primary water supply flows through our forests—the majority of which, as noted previously, are owned by families and individuals. From 1952 to 1996, NIPF owners produced 59 percent of total timber harvest volume, while industrial forests produced 30 percent, and national forests produced 5 percent. Southern NIPFs accounted for 64 percent of the NIPF harvest; NIPFs on the Pacific Coast accounted for 16 percent. Clearly, proper management of NIPFs is important to maintaining landscape-scale healthy forest conditions and valued forest ecosystem services of watershed, wildlife habitat, aesthetics/open space, and recreation. We cannot afford to ignore this important resource.

In my home state of California, for example, forested ecosystems are a large and important element, covering 30 percent of the land area, or 30 million acres. These forests are owned and managed by public agencies such as the USDA-Forest Service and the National Park Service (50 percent by area), by forest product companies (12 percent), and by 350,000 nonindustrial owners (38 percent). These diverse ecosystems are habitat for thousands of plant and animal species, many endemic to California or otherwise rare. Forested watersheds provide water for 80 percent of the domestic, industrial, and agricultural users in the state and the resource base for an important timber industry that supplies about 50 percent of California's lumber and wood products needs. Recreational uses of forests have increased dramatically in the past 20 years and are expected to continue to increase over the next 50 years.

Over the next 50 years, California is expected to lose 20 percent of its NIPF forestland to development. Private forests nationwide are increasingly threatened by urban sprawl, nonforest development, fragmentation, and parcelization. Although some regions of the country are experiencing increases in forestland, according to a National Research Council report, nationwide an additional 20 million acres are at risk of being lost to these factors by 2020.

Fragmentation and parcelization continue to be two of the less visible threats to private forests. Fragmentation—when forests are broken into isolated patches—is often regarded as one of the greatest threats to biodiversity worldwide and is a factor in declining wildlife habitat. Parcelization—where forests are broken down into smaller parcels with different landowners—is a factor in reduced forest functionality. Today, forests are being broken down into parcels of 100 acres or smaller at the rate of approximately 2 million acres per year. Together, fragmentation and parcelization contribute to a forested landscape that is more susceptible to development and increasing management uncertainty. If we wish to manage our forests sustainably we must ensure that these forests remain forests.

So what can be done? Private landownership and the issues associated with it have been studied for decades. There are a variety of mechanisms to curb these problems and promote sustainable management of these forests so they continue to provide desired

needs and values. One of the more effective mechanisms is to provide technical, educational, and financial assistance to these family forestland owners, as Congress authorized with the creation of the Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP) in the 2002 Farm Bill. We appreciate the efforts of this Committee in creating this program and seeing it through the bill's negotiations. Now, two years later, we are struggling to keep this program in place. No program funds have been released this year—even those specifically allocated by Congress. SAF believes these forests are important enough to warrant continuation of this program.

Let me give you a few examples of how landowner education and cost-share programs can maintain these NIPF forests as working forests, providing sufficient income to make it worthwhile to keep it in forest cover for watershed, wildlife, and open space.

The state of California recognized the public value of NIPF land by creating the California Forest Improvement Program (CFIP). In 2000–2003, CFIP allocated $2.2 million in cost-share grants with funds derived from timber harvest on state forests—a reinvestment of income from forest management back into forest management on NIPF forestlands (20- to 5,000-acre ownerships). A sampling of these grants shows $800,000 went to 59 landowners who own an average of 350 acres and received an average of $14,000 for thinning, weed control, planting, wildlife habitat improvement, road repair, and watershed restoration. Since implementation of CFIP began, projects have been implemented on more than 20,000 acres of forestland, helping to create habitat for species such as wood ducks, steelhead, mule deer, and sandhill cranes and restoring various conifer and hardwood species. In 2003 FLEP funding was rolled into this program to help cover the costs.

In 2000 the California State Resources Agency convened the Forestland Incentives Task Force to improve the use of incentives and cooperative programs (rather than regulations) to conserve forested lands, promote sustainable forestry, and protect forest resources. This action recognizes the value of NIPF forestlands and the need for incentives to reward good management for public trust values that do not have a market value—watershed, wildlife, open space, aesthetics, hunting/fishing recreation, air quality.

In Virginia, FLEP money was used to hold workshops to help landowners understand the variety of options available to them both financially and technically. In these workshops, landowners learn that there are experts who can help them protect water quality in the streams in their forests and that they can implement silvicultural practices that will help them gain financially from their forests and therefore make keeping their forest land a viable option. Without workshops such as this, forest landowners will remain unaware of how forest management can help them achieve their management objectives.

I'm personally involved in similar outreach efforts in California. In feedback I've received after teaching landowner courses, many cite a greater understanding of things such as: vertical and horizontal vegetation distribution effect on wildland fire, power of outsloping and rolling dips on erosion, the economics of timber production, edge effects on wildlife, pest diagnosis, and riparian management. Others benefited from learning about cost sharing, program assistance, and forest planning. Still others appreciate learning how to control weeds on their property and maintain forest roads.

Of particular interest to California family landowners is, of course, wildfire risk reduction. After these educational courses, many realize the need to conduct fuels reduction and work with foresters to develop and implement plans to treat their forests. Among these landowners there is a great interest in learning of any assistance available to conduct thinning, fuels treatment, and replanting after fires.

As you can see, forest landowner education, outreach, and cost-share programs, such as FLEP, Forest Stewardship and others, have been extremely important to the family forestland owner community and potentially can contribute to the sustainable management of over half of the nation's forestland. FLEP in particular, is beneficial because it helps accomplish important work on the ground that would otherwise not be completed. To emphasize the importance of FLEP, I'd like to offer some key reasons why SAF believes the program is critical to sustainable forest management on family owned forests.

FLEP solely addresses private, non-industrial forestland owners. There certainly are other assistance options that private forest landowners are eligible for: the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, and the Department of the Interior's Cooperative Conservation Initiative, to name a few. However, FLEP is designed to stand out among these programs, addressing a specific niche that often is underserved by other agricultural land conservation programs such as these. The authors of FLEP specified that this program is designed solely for private ***forest*** landowners. It is extremely difficult for forest landowners to participate in what are—rightly so—predominantly agriculture land conservation programs. Agriculture landowner programs certainly have their place, but historically they have not served the private forest landowner community to the extent necessary. Congress recognized this concern and responded by creating a program in the 1996 Farm Bill; it revised this program in the 2002 Farm Bill into what today is the Forest Land Enhancement Program.

FLEP, with the assistance of the Forest Stewardship Program, assists in meeting often unattainable goals that provide benefits to the landowner and the public. Many of the management goals that NIPF landowners express are public trust objectives—such as wildlife habitat, open space and aesthetically pleasing forests, watersheds that produce clean water and healthy fisheries, fire hazard mitigation, and maintaining an overall healthy forest. Because these goals do not produce income and can be quite costly to achieve, they often remain good but unattained intentions. The Forest Stewardship Program, which assists landowners with the creation of a management plan and identification of management practices, and FLEP, which can be used to assist landowners in implementing their plans, complement each other in helping landowners achieve these often unattainable goals while providing numerous public benefits in the process.

FLEP offers an integrated approach to land management, allowing family forest landowners to meet a variety of economic and ecological objectives. Landowner surveys have demonstrated that timber harvesting typically is not the primary reason for ownership. In fact, only 20 percent of NIPF landowners state that they own their forest for economic reasons. These forestland owners come from diverse backgrounds and viewpoints and own their land for a multitude of values and uses—primarily recreation

and enjoyment. These forests also face threats such as wildfire, insects, disease, and invasive species, to name a few. Only with an integrated approach to management of these forests—for example, combining fuels treatment with timber stand improvement and recreational opportunities—will these families achieve their objectives and thus be more inclined to retain their forestland. FLEP is unique because of its flexibility to meet the needs of these diverse landowners. Its purpose is to assist with sustainable management, no matter what the objectives of the landowner are. It provides flexibility to meet various management objectives in the same forests. It is not focused solely on one benefit such as wildlife habitat or clean water and instead, integrates these objectives into a comprehensive land management approach, creating a unique opportunity to meet both private objectives and public needs.

FLEP helps family landowners conduct sustainable timber harvesting. Although the majority of forestland owners do not own their land for timber production, they may wish to harvest timber on their lands for financial reasons. Family situations, illnesses, and college tuitions, for example, create circumstances in which these owners have a choice between selling or parceling their land or harvesting timber. It is extremely important in these instances that forest landowners have professional forestry expertise to help them with this harvesting. Forestry professionals can help landowners apply various silvicultural tools to ensure that harvesting is done in a sustainable manner and that landowners' other objectives are realized. FLEP offers a way for these landowners to get this assistance.

Conclusions

SAF strongly believes that program funding should continue so we can continue to meet the needs of the more than 9 million nonindustrial private forest landowners, mostly family forestland owners, throughout the country. One year of program implementation is not an adequate time frame to judge whether the program is fulfilling its goals. New programs often take several years to develop and become successful. We must allow FLEP adequate time to reach its full potential.

We must recognize that these family-owned forests are critical to our continued well-being as a society. FLEP funding and other landowner assistance mechanisms are critical and must stay in place to assist these landowners. We look forward to continuing our work with this Committee to address the needs of family forestland owners.